DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 334 731 EC 300 466

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TITLE The Boarding Alternative for Young Dyslexic Children.
INSTITUTION Greenwood Inst., Putney, VT.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Boarding Schools; *Dyslexia; Educational Benefits; Elementary Secondary Education; *Language Handicaps; Referral; Remedial Programs; Residential Schools; *School Effectiveness; Special Schools; Student Development

ABSTRACT

In a question-and-answer format, this pamphlet offers a rationale for having students with dyslexia attend a junior boarding school. The information focuses on: criteria for determining appropriateness of a specialized boarding program; most appropriate age for referral; helping parents deal with their anxiety; benefits of a boarding school over tutors and resource room programs; benefits of attending boarding school before the high-school level; benefits of attending a special school with a dyslexia program over a regular junior boarding school; emphasis in these schools on sports in which dyslexic students traditionally excel; and the structure of remedial boarding schools. (JDD)

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THE BOARDING ALTERNATIVE FOR YOUNG DYSLEXIC CHILDREN

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The Greenwood Institute is a non-profit corporation. In cooperation with The Greenwood School, it provides professional education and seeks to advance knowledge of dyslexia and related language disorders.

recycled paper

This pamphlet is the result of many discussions, over the past fourteen years, with psychologists, educational consultants, and physicians. The following questions occur regularly. The answers reflect the writer's experience with hundreds of students whose lives have been transformed as a result of attending a junior boarding school.

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1. ***What are some criteria for determining if a specialized boarding program is appropriate for a student?***

Any one of the following conditions makes boarding school worth consideration if the student's talents and abilities are to be realized without undue frustration.

a. Several attempts by local institutions to accommodate have been unsuccessful.

b. Siblings, especially younger ones, excel in academic and social arenas. Even in the most supportive families, the child inevitably feels inferior by comparison.

c. Signs of social withdrawal and lack of academic interest occur.

d. Excessive use of "I'm stupid" or "I'm no good at anything."

e. Increasing resistance to school attendance.

f. Homework becomes a nightly ordeal which leaves everyone frustrated.

g. Academic progress has stagnated in comparison with previous years.

h. Psychological evaluation suggests progress needs to be accelerated. The child's intellectual capability is not being utilized due to poor language skills.

i. Family pressure is building as a result of the child's difficulties.

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2. ***What is the most appropriate age for a student to be referred to a boarding school specializing in language training?***

Students should experience success as soon as possible, lest emotional reactions to failure occur or worsen. If a boarding school is judged to offer the best opportunity for success, nothing is gained by waiting. Students as young as eight can benefit from a boarding school. Most students enroll between ages ten and twelve. The most important factor is to experience quality remediation before the student is faced with the more demanding curriculum of secondary school.

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3. ***How can parents be helped to deal with the anxiety they feel when boarding school is proposed for their young child?***

Children will always need the love and care of parents and family, but the child's emotional need to experience academic success increases with each year of failure. If

success has not been realized by fourth grade, it often becomes the primary preoccupation of the child. Until this need is met, family love and support can be best expressed by placing the child in an environment where he can realize academic success.

Attempts to alleviate the problem with extra family support will not be effective for the bright language-troubled child. While living at boarding school he will be cared for by a dedicated staff whose primary focus is the education and nurturing of children. In many cases they live on-campus and are an integral part of the 24-hour school community. With all their other distractions and concerns, parents are hard-pressed to provide supportive counseling and consistent academic help which is available in remedial boarding schools.

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4. ***Why does my child need to go to a boarding school when we have good tutors here at home?***

Students are almost always helped by good tutors. Still, emotional difficulties may occur when lessons must be scheduled during periods when peers are enjoying recreational activities. A good tutor may impart necessary language skills, and yet be unable to assure that a child will apply newly learned skills when reading, writing and spelling in untutored classes. The practice of independently applying skills taught in the tutorial lesson is the most difficult habit to instill in children with language-learning problems.

Remedial boarding schools have effective programs to assure this transfer of skills.

5. ***Our local public school is setting up a complete program, including a resource room and tutoring, and our child is being tracked in special classes for math, social studies and science. Won't that be sufficient?***

It might be, but here are some questions to ask:

- How much language training do the resource room teacher and tutor possess? (In many states a person with little or no specialized language training can become certified in special education--a very broad field encompassing a wide variety of school-related problems.)

- Will the language training my child receives in the resource room be based on the same methods and principles utilized by the tutor?

- Are the tracked classes specifically for intelligent students with language problems, or do they contain students with a variety of school problems, including emotional and behavioral problems?

- How many students are in a class?

- Are the teachers in the tracked classes trained in remedial methods so they can help the student to apply what he has learned in the resource room and with the tutor?

- Based on previous experience, will my child have the same teachers for the entire school year?

When seeking information, ask questions in a general way--e.g., What is the training and background of the tutor/resource room teacher? How many different kinds of school-related problems are served in the tracked classes?

Be sure to visit the program to see how it actually operates, and check with parents whose children have received service.

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6. ***I think boarding school might be a good idea, but what is wrong with waiting until high school?***

There are other considerations besides those discussed in sections 2 & 3. A good secondary school provides many opportunities for advanced learning. The early and mid-teen years, when the intellect is blossoming, is the ideal time to take advantage of academic enrichment. It is, therefore, the worst time to begin intensive work on basic skills which should have been mastered at the elementary school level.

When a child enters high school, adolescence with all its hormonal changes and social pressures is beginning or well under way. Adolescents have enough peer issues without being "singled out" for remedial training in elementary skills.

Finally, many language-troubled students become increasingly frustrated the longer effective remediation is delayed. As a student matures and obtains privileges of more independence, a driver's license, etc., the possibilities for and consequences of acting out frustrations become more severe.

7. ***My child is extremely bright and achieving even a little above grade level. Yet his language skills are not what they should be and he seems frustrated. The school says he is doing okay. Does he really need special help?***

A child with a very high measured IQ who exhibits a significant scatter in intellectual abilities and a discrepancy between estimated intelligence and actual academic performance needs specialized language training in order to realize full potential.

The major difference between this child and peers of normal or superior intelligence is that his threshold of skills is higher. Simply put, a high threshold means that this highly intelligent child has managed to acquire skills on a par with his chronological peers of average intelligence.

However, when these gifted students must reach beyond their threshold, they display the same problems as their less gifted, dyslexic peers. At this point, they need sensitive and specialized teaching techniques to help them extend previous educational boundaries.

Unless they receive intensive remediation, these students, even though capable of good average performance in junior high, will experience increasing difficulty as they encounter more demanding subject matter in advanced grades.

8. *I agree that my son needs a boarding program, but why won't a regular junior boarding school which has a program for dyslexics be just as effective as a special school?*

The traditional focus of most junior boarding schools has been to prepare students for advanced placement in secondary schools. Within such a program, a mild or well-remediated dyslexic could be well served. However, within the past several years, many junior boarding schools have begun to actively recruit a much broader and more academically needy range of dyslexic students.

Whenever such a change occurs in independent schools, it is a good idea to assure yourself that the change has been reflected in the school's stated mission and objectives. It is essential that both faculty and administration desire, as a matter of policy, to serve students who need special help, and that the program is not a short-term strategy to boost a sagging enrollment. Once this important issue is settled, the same type of exploration can be used as described above in section 5.

An additional issue to be considered is the highly competitive atmosphere in both the classroom and extra-curricular areas of many junior boarding schools. While competition motivates most young people to put forth extra effort to excel, it inhibits others and too often causes those with learning difficulties to conceal their real academic needs. It is not unusual for a resourceful learning-disabled student to persuade friends to write papers and do his homework for him.

When involved in intensive language remediation, the only performance a student should be concerned with beating is his own score of yesterday.

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9. ***The remedial junior boarding schools I examined have limited enrollments and lack the athletic facilities of the regular junior boarding schools. Shouldn't my son have the benefit of these opportunities?***

Remedial junior boarding schools have been designed specifically for students who need intensive assistance with language training. Their limited enrollment and highly trained staff assure that proper teaching strategies are developed for each student so that his success can be as rapid as possible.

In addition, these schools stress sports in which dyslexic students traditionally excel, sports in which balance and rhythmic flow are predominant and memorized plays are minimal. Most students, even if they have negative memories about sports, learn to enjoy them when properly coached. When involved in competition with other schools, they are in a win-win situation. Schools with enrollments of 150+ are expected to win over much smaller schools. When the latter win--and they often do in properly selected sports--the surge in self-confidence is gratifying.

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10. ***What are the advantages of limiting enrollment to students who have language problems? Won't they miss the benefits of mainstream education?***

Junior boarding schools for students who experience difficulty learning language are very intensive and are designed to prepare students to return to mainstream education as soon as possible. During their brief enrollment, students experience many advantages. In terms of their language needs, they enjoy benefits analogous to the college student who travels abroad to live with a foreign host while learning a language. Students in remedial boarding schools live with and learn from adults who are well trained in the subject the students most need to learn.

In addition, many specialized junior boarding schools offer courses in subjects where dyslexic students excel. The high degree of success students enjoy in these subjects boosts morale and motivates them for those subjects in which they experience greater difficulty. Some schools offer unique programs to awaken talent. These can be discussed with educational consultants and during admission interviews.

During the brief period of mastering basic language skills and discovering the positive aspects of dyslexia, these students can make faster progress and enjoy more normal peer relations if enrollment is limited and the school environment specially designed for their needs.

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11. ***Most remedial boarding schools say they are structured. Everyone seems to think that's a good idea. What does it mean?***

There are two types of structure, surface and deep. The <u>surface</u> structure consists of the daily schedule, amount and limits of free time, dress code, weekend procedures, disci-

plinary policy, and other similar rules. Deep structure encompasses a variety of techniques to clarify for a student what he must do to achieve success, and to quickly acknowledge success when it occurs.

While all remedial junior boarding schools are structured, each one expresses it in a unique fashion. The most important question to be answered is: Will the type of structure present in this school promote successful experiences for my child?

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12. ***I have been told that my child is not a dyslexic, yet he is having trouble learning some language skills, gets confused, can't always remember what he reads, and is having trouble in school. Can a remedial language school help me?***

Some remedial language schools limit their enrollment to students whose problems are concerned only with the coding skills of reading, writing and spelling. Other schools, in addition to the above, offer help for students who need additional assistance with English as a communication tool. These students receive training in oral expression, listening, reading comprehension, and other communication skills as needed.

Admission personnel at each school can assist with this question, and inform you if their school is appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Information on residential programs for students in need of remedial language skill training is available in the "Boarding Schools" directory published annually by the Boarding Schools division of the National Association of Independent Schools. This publication is distributed to many libraries, public school guidance offices, educational counselors, and private school admissions staff, or may be obtained by contacting NAIS:

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